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ABSTRACT

Although early childhood education is important for all children, research suggests that it is particularly important for low-income and educationally disadvantaged children. Of the 53 Austin Independent School District (AISD) elementary schools that provided prekindergarten education, five Title I schools with full-day prekindergarten programs were selected for this study to determine exemplary practices, based on program administrators' recommendations and longitudinal test data from 1993 to 1996 on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised or the Test de Vocabulario en Imagines Peabody. Findings indicated that factors contributing to program success were: (1) strong teacher commitment to developing an age- and developmentally-appropriate curriculum; (2) supportive principals who encouraged and respected teachers as professionals; (3) teacher participation in professional development; (4) emphasis on language building activities, first in the child's native language; (5) importance of teacher teamwork, school-wide and at individual grades; and (6) strong parental involvement. Educational strategies included informal and formal assessment, bilingual education, special education inclusion, and multi-age classrooms and activities. The developmentally appropriate program guidelines of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) provided the program's framework. Recommendations included the continued use of NAEYC guidelines, recruitment of certified early childhood and bilingual teachers, increased funds for teachers' professional development and children's field trips, funding of full-day programs, and encouragement of research-based instructional strategies. Follow-up achievement data indicated that the program benefited language development, especially for Spanish-speaking students. (Appendices include the interview questions and language and achievement test information.) (Author/KB)

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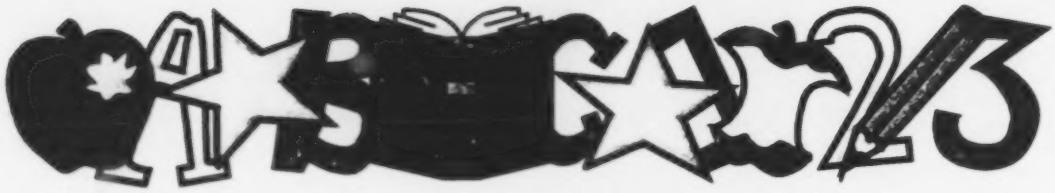

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Pre-K Best Practices Review

1996-97

AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
OFFICE OF PROGRAM EVALUATION

MAY 1997

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Pre-K Best Practices Review, 1996-97

Executive Summary

Austin Independent School District
Department of Accountability, Student Services, and Research
Office of Program Evaluation

Authors: Janice Curry, Wanda Washington, and Gloria Zyskowski, Ph.D.

Overview

Over the past decade, prekindergarten (pre-K) programs have become an increasingly visible part of public education. This growth reflects the increased awareness of the value of early childhood education. The experiences provided by prekindergarten may be critical to the future success of the disadvantaged children that are served.

In the 1996-97 school year, 53 Austin Independent School District (AISD) elementary schools provided prekindergarten education. Twenty of the schools offered half-day classes while 33 schools offered full-day classes. Half-day pre-K is mandated and funded by the State for all four-year-olds who are limited English proficient (LEP), low-income, or homeless. In AISD, Title I provided funding for an extra half day of instruction at the schools with the highest percentage of economically disadvantaged children. Thirty-three of the 36 elementary schools that receive Title I funds have a full-day pre-K program.

Although early childhood education is important for all children, research suggests that it is particularly important for low-income and educationally disadvantaged children. With this knowledge, the AISD Title I evaluation staff designed a plan to explore district pre-K programs for exemplary practices. The purpose of this Pre-K Best Practices Review was to identify practices in use that lead to strong and consistent improvement in achievement for pre-K students and to share that information with other schools that offer pre-K instruction.

Methodology

The five schools that participated in this study were selected by two criteria:

- Longitudinal test data (1993-94 through 1995-96) on the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test - Revised* (PPVT-R) and the *Test de Vocabulario en Imagines Peabody* (TVIP); and
- The recommendation of program administrators.

The five schools selected for this study are Andrews, Brooke, Galindo, Reilly, and Travis Heights. All of the schools, with the exception of Travis Heights, are Title I schools and have full-day pre-K programs.

Major Findings

Teachers and principals at Pre-K Best Practices Schools stated that factors contributing to the success of the pre-K programs at their campuses include the following:

- Strong teacher commitment to developing a curriculum that is age- and developmentally appropriate;
- Supportive principals who encourage and respect teachers as professionals;
- Teacher participation in professional development sessions;
- Emphasis on language building activities, first in the child's native language;
- Importance of teacher teamwork, schoolwide and at individual grades; and
- Strong parental involvement.

Many strategies for educating young children are in place at these Best Practices schools, including, the use of both informal and formal assessment tools, bilingual education, special education inclusion, and multi-age classrooms and activities.

While these pre-K programs have some common themes, each program is unique and is designed to best address the specific needs of the students served. The developmentally appropriate guidelines established by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) are the framework for the pre-K programs observed in this study.

According to the principals at the Best Practices schools, an effective early childhood program needs a pre-K teacher who is energetic, flexible, and willing to try new things. He/she must be able to work on a team, focus on students, have high expectations for students, and have a love and a passion for teaching young learners.

Recommendations

1. Continue to use developmentally appropriate guidelines established by the National Association for the Education of Young Children as the framework for the prekindergarten programs in AISD.
2. Continue to recruit certified early childhood and bilingual teachers for the prekindergarten program.
3. Increase funds for professional development of teachers and for field trip experiences for children.
4. Continue funding full-day pre-K and consider increasing the number of schools that are eligible for full-day funding.
5. Encourage the use of research-based instructional strategies and programs to increase achievement at the early childhood level.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, prekindergarten (pre-K) programs have become an increasingly visible part of public education. This growth reflects the increased awareness of the value of early childhood education. Although early childhood education is important for all children, research suggests that it is particularly important for low-income and educationally disadvantaged children. The experiences provided by prekindergarten programs may be critical to the future success of the disadvantaged children that are served.

The Texas Legislature adopted major educational reform legislation in 1984 directed at assisting at-risk students. Among the reforms was House Bill 72, which mandated prekindergarten education in Texas public schools for four-year old children who were limited English proficient (LEP) or from a low-income family.

The prekindergarten essential elements which became effective in Texas public schools in September 1995 focus on the areas of communication, cognition, motor, fine arts, social/emotional, intellectual, aesthetic, and physical development. A new prekindergarten curriculum was adopted for use in Texas public schools in September 1995, as well.

There is a current emphasis on students reading on grade level by grade 4 that is supported by Texas Governor Bush and President Clinton. In Texas, demographic changes over the past decade have made an impact on education. The percentage of economically disadvantaged children increased 28.3% over the last decade in Texas, more than twice the rate of increase in the United States as a whole. The task of education is complicated by the fact that children enter school at various ages and with widely different educational experiences. Children from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds have a great amount of academic "catching up" to do before they can read on grade level. The success of the reading initiatives may depend on a successful early childhood education for children from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.

In 1996-97, the Austin Independent School District (AISD) Title I evaluation staff designed and carried out a plan to explore district pre-K programs for exemplary practices. This *Pre-K Best Practices Review* is the result of the investigation. First, a summarization of some related pre-K studies as well as best practices studies to discover factors that improve student achievement will be presented. The purpose of this review, the selection of the schools, and descriptions of the instruments used will follow. Five campuses, four Title I and one non-Title I, were selected for this study. Summaries of the information gained through visits to the five campuses and interviews with the teachers and principals will be presented by school. An overall summary and discussion of achievement data will conclude this review.

Review of Related Early Childhood Research

Studies which reflect the uniqueness of Texas early childhood education are of particular interest for background for this Pre-K Best Practices Review. The State of Texas has embarked on two major projects to improve early childhood education. Studies that will be discussed in this section include the following:

- *Texas Evaluation Study of Prekindergarten Programs* published by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) in July 1995.

- *First Impressions* - Report of the Task Force on Early Childhood and Elementary Education in January 1994.

TEA Longitudinal Prekindergarten Study

In 1989, the Texas Education Agency initiated a study of the general state of prekindergarten education in Texas. The guidelines established by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) provided the framework for the examination of developmentally appropriate practices in prekindergarten programs. These guidelines were formulated by NAEYC in response to the widespread use of inappropriate formal teaching techniques for young children, and the overemphasis on achievement of narrowly defined academic skills.

The concept of "developmental appropriateness" as set forth by NAEYC has two dimensions: a) age appropriateness, and b) individual appropriateness. The first dimension entails using knowledge of child development to identify a range of meaningful behaviors, activities, and materials for a specific age group. The second dimension entails creating a classroom environment containing materials and activities that correspond to the children's individual interests, strengths, and experiences. To specifically address the diverse backgrounds of Texas prekindergarten children, a third dimension was added: language and cultural appropriateness. This dimension is a recognition of the importance of using the child's primary language in the classroom. According to NAEYC, classrooms with teachers who employ developmentally appropriate practices look like this:

- Children are engaged in active, not passive, learning experiences, many of which are child-initiated, based on activities and materials that are real, concrete, and relevant to the lives of young children.
- Classrooms contain materials and activities for a wide range of developmental interests and abilities.
- Child-initiated, child-directed, teacher-supported play is the most natural way for young children to learn, and is an integral part of the program day.
- Children develop language and communication skills by using language to express needs, insights, excitement, and to solve problems through interaction with adults and peers.
- Children spend most of the time working individually or in small groups.
- Parents and others from the community are involved with the program.

The TEA final report, entitled *Texas Evaluation Study of Prekindergarten Programs*, was published in July 1995. Findings from the TEA longitudinal component of the prekindergarten evaluation study indicated that prekindergarten education is making a difference in the lives of children and families in Texas. Positive trends in academic performance were found for children who participated in pre-K programs. In 1994, four years after attending prekindergarten, students from pre-K programs were:

- less likely to be retained;
- closer to being on grade level in reading comprehension, based on data reported by teachers; and
- less likely to be referred for special education programs.

The statewide comparisons made on 1994 *Texas Assessment of Academic Skills* (TAAS) grade 3 test performance in reading and mathematics between former pre-K students and similar students who did not attend pre-K showed normal curve equivalent (NCE) scores about two points higher in both reading and mathematics for the former pre-K students than for the non-prekindergarten group. Although the differences were in the desired direction, the scores were still lower than the statewide average for all third graders in Texas.

Differences were also found between students with limited English proficiency (LEP) who had attended pre-K and those who were eligible but did not attend. Students who attended pre-K exhibited each of the following characteristics:

- were at or above grade level in oral reading based on data reported by teachers;
- mastered a greater number of mathematics essential elements based on data reported by teachers;
- were more likely to be promoted to the next grade;
- were less likely to be referred for special education programs; and
- were less likely to be placed in special education programs.

In looking at statewide 1994 TAAS third grade test performance for LEP students, the differences between former pre-K students and LEP students who did not attend pre-K were even more pronounced. NCE scores were about five points higher in both reading and mathematics for former LEP pre-K students than for LEP students who did not attend pre-K.

Report of the Task Force on Early Childhood and Elementary Education

The Texas State Board of Education created the Task Force on Early Childhood and Elementary Education in January 1993. The 37 members of the task force included members of the State Board of Education, teachers, counselors, principals, administrators, members of local school boards, representatives of state government, and appointees from organizations representing parents, early care and education providers, higher education faculty, and the business community. The Board directed the task force to do the following:

- examine the condition of the State's children between birth and entrance into middle school;
- develop a policy that guarantees a high quality, integrated system of early childhood and elementary education in Texas; and
- formulate recommendations for implementing the policy goals.

The task force defined developmentally appropriate early childhood and elementary education as programs and practices that focus on the principles and stages of child development; foster individual interests and understanding; value cultural and linguistic diversity; and recognize the social nature of learning. The task force also concluded that "*developmentally appropriate practices are based upon the principle that children construct knowledge from active experience with their physical and social environments. They are built on a vision of education that ensures that every child will be prepared for future academic and personal success through a strong foundation in reading and mastery of educational goals. They expand opportunities for learning by accommodating each child's culture, language, and learning style.*" Descriptions of a few of the learning strategies used effective with young children follow.

Child-Centered Instruction - Instruction for young children needs to be child-centered. Children acquire the skills, concepts, and knowledge that make up the curriculum through rich and varied interactions with teachers, peers, and materials. Instruction in child-centered early childhood and elementary programs engages each child in an active process of learning and understanding.

Both effective learning and effective instruction are achieved through deep understanding of the curriculum. The task force recommends that teachers participate in the design and implementation of the curriculum in their schools. Effective teachers, equipped with this understanding of curriculum and a detailed knowledge of the children in their classrooms, are able to organize learning environments that provide children with a range of experiences in a variety of settings, and are able to support high levels of achievement for all students. Child-centered learning supports the characteristics of young learners; these characteristics are as follows:

- Young children are innately curious and will strive to learn.
- Playful activity is a natural way of learning.
- Young children learn by imitating, talking with, and interacting with each other as well as with adults.
- Concrete and multisensory materials are children's tools for learning.
- Young children can simultaneously acquire knowledge and skills in many areas.
- Learning occurs at different rates.
- Real-life experiences related to the interests of children promote learning.
- Education impacts the "whole" child, and vice versa.
- Experiencing successes builds a sense of security and self-confidence.

Multi-age Grouping - Mixed-age classrooms, particularly at the primary grade levels, are becoming more widespread as educators implement developmentally appropriate programs. Heterogeneous mixed-aged classrooms can facilitate instruction for continuous student progress. Mixed-age instruction provides children with extended time to acquire in-depth understanding at particular curricular levels, and expands social opportunities for learning as younger children can interact over long periods of time with older students. Mixed-age groups may also relieve many of the problems related to retention by accommodating children's varied patterns of academic and social development.

Bilingual Instruction - In the diverse culture of Texas, instruction must address the special needs of the state's linguistic and ethnic minority children. Bilingual instruction is important to ensure success for students with limited proficiency in English. Research indicates that effective programs provide instruction, particularly in literacy development, in the primary language in early childhood programs while simultaneously facilitating the acquisition of English.

Play - One important way in which children develop understanding is through active involvement with adults and other children. Play is a crucial link in the connection between integrated learning and student interest. According to NAEYC, play allows children to explore, to experiment with, and to manipulate materials in ways that are essential for understanding an integrated curriculum. Child-initiated and teacher-facilitated play provides opportunities for children to spontaneously practice newly acquired skills or knowledge.

REVIEW OF RELATED BEST PRACTICES STUDIES

Because this study examines exemplary practices in use at schools that show strong and improving achievement, it is also important to know of best practices findings from other studies. The two best practices summaries that will be discussed in this section include the following:

- *Successful Texas Schoolwide Programs* - A qualitative study by the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin conducted in 1995-96; and
- *Title I Best Practices Review, 1995-96* - A review of four Austin Independent School District Title I schoolwide programs published in 1995-96.

The information gained from these related studies gives added insight into best practices in Title I schools and knowledge of early childhood education practices.

Successful Texas Schoolwide Programs

The Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin conducted a qualitative study in 1995-96 called *Successful Texas Schoolwide Programs*. Through a grant provided by the Texas Education Agency and funding support from the U.S. Department of Education's Region VIII Comprehensive Center, the STAR (Support for Texas Academic Renewal) Center studied schools in Texas that met the following important criteria:

1. In 1994-95, the schools had a high percentage of students who met the federal criteria to receive free or reduced-price lunches. All of the schools had over 60 percent of the students (most had over 75 percent) who met the lunch criteria.
2. The schools received Title I funds and were at various stages of implementing Title I schoolwide programs.
3. In the spring of 1995, in each school at least 70 percent of the students passed the reading section of the *Texas Assessment of Academic Skills* (TAAS) and at least 70 percent of the students passed the mathematics section of the TAAS.

For the study, 26 schools were chosen to represent the diversity of Texas. While this study reviewed campuses that all had reached important achievement goals on the TAAS, the common characteristics at these campuses are characteristics that improve education for all students, including prekindergarten students. The common characteristics include the following:

- *Focus on the Academic Success of Every Student* - At these successful schools, there is a strong focus on the academic success of every student. The schools' sense of mission is articulated in every aspect of planning, organization, and the use of resources.
- *No Excuses* - Educators at these schools believe that they can succeed with any student, regardless of the nature of the student's home situation or previous performance.
- *Experimentation* - Educators feel such a strong responsibility for ensuring the academic success of students that they eagerly sought ways to improve teaching and learning.
- *Inclusivity: Everyone Is Part of the Solution* - In these schools, everyone who comes in contact with a student is a partner in ensuring that student's academic success.

- *Sense of Family*-- Not only are students, parents, and all school personnel included as a part of the team, they are also included as part of the school family. Students are treated with respect and concern.
- *Collaboration and Trust* - In the schools studied, openness, honesty, and trust characterize most of the interactions among school personnel. In addition, school personnel openly share concerns and successes with each other.
- *Passion for Learning and Growing* - School staff continue to challenge and push themselves toward the attainment of ever-higher goals. At the schools visited, there is a constantly held belief that improvement is possible.

AISD Title I Best Practices Review, 1995-96

In 1995-96, four Title I schoolwide programs at the elementary school level were selected for inclusion in a Title I Best Practices Review of schoolwide programs in AISD. Schools were selected based on overall student achievement and continuous gains in student achievement from 1992-93 to 1994-95. The review was carried out to explore effective practices at the selected Title I schoolwide programs, and to share this information with staff of other AISD schools. Many of the themes found to be recurring in the *Successful Texas Schoolwide Programs* study were also found in the *Title I Best Practices Review*. While each of the schools is unique, many of the principles and philosophies that guide the campuses are similar.

- At each of the Best Practices Schools, staff and administration use site-based management to make effective instructional program decisions that are reflected in the Campus Improvement Plans. Staff and administration are extensively involved in the decision-making process.
- Parental involvement is encouraged and promoted.
- At each of the schools, staff and administration have implemented some form of self-evaluation. Constant assessment of students' progress is essential to the success of these campuses.
- All students at these campuses are expected to achieve at high levels. There are high expectations for the teachers as well.
- Professional development is valued by staff and administration at these schools.
- Two common factors across the schools are strong leadership and a team-like approach to teaching.

According to the *Title I Best Practices Review*, there does not seem to be a single formula for a successful school. However, it is clear that administration, staff, students, parents, and community are all integral parts of the process. Teachers and principals must be committed to a common goal of improving student learning by using whichever methods are most appropriate for their students.

AISD PRE-K PROGRAM OVERVIEW

In the Austin Independent School District (AISD), 53 elementary schools are providing prekindergarten education in 1996-97Twenty of the schools offer half-day classes while 33 schools offer full-day classes. Half-day pre-K is mandated and funded by the State for all four-

year-olds who are limited English proficient, low income, or homeless. Title I provides funding for an extra half day of instruction at 33 of the 36 Title I schools.

The pre-K program in AISD began in the fall of 1978 with five classes of 20 students each taught by a certified teacher and an aide. The program, which was implemented prior to the State mandate, has grown since then. The AISD prekindergarten program served 3,399 four-year-olds during 1995-96.

According to the AISD brochure on the prekindergarten program, entitled *A Sound Investment in Tomorrow's World*, the program focuses on language and concept development, problem solving, and thinking skills. The brochure states that, "*Concept development is enhanced by providing hands-on activities for the children--they interact with real things and participate in school and community events. Language is promoted all day, every day. Language skills are developed through large/small group instruction, individual instruction, and during story and study times. This is probably the greatest contribution the program makes to students and most likely accounts for the noteworthy academic success these students attain.*"

The philosophy of the program states that, "*It is a well-known fact that children's early experiences have a great bearing on their later academic success. In order to provide the kinds of experiences which will lead to academic growth, preschool programs should have a rich and nurturing environment that promotes development in all areas--social, emotional, physical, and intellectual.*" Every classroom in the AISD prekindergarten program is staffed by a certified teacher. The majority of the pre-K teachers have early childhood or kindergarten certification, according to Anita Uphaus who is the Coordinator of the Early Childhood Program for AISD. A professional development event specifically for pre-K teachers is the summer Early Childhood Summit.

During an interview with Anita Uphaus, she made the following comments about prekindergarten. "*Early childhood education gives the child from an economically disadvantaged background a foundation to start school successfully. It provides the right kinds of activities for students to begin reading. Children experience things they have never been exposed to through activities.*"

OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGY

With the knowledge that early childhood education is very important for economically disadvantaged children, the Title I evaluation staff designed a plan for the 1996-97 school year to investigate exemplary practices in the AISD prekindergarten programs. The purpose of the Pre-K Best Practices Review was to identify practices in use that lead to strong and consistent improvement in achievement for pre-K students and to share that information with other schools with pre-K programs.

Selection of the Schools

The two criteria used for selection of the Pre-K Best Practices schools were achievement and recommendation by program administrators. An explanation of these criteria follow:

- *Longitudinal test data* - The *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised* (PPVT-R) and *Test de Vocabulario en Imagines Peabody* (TVIP) have been administered to AISD pre-K children since 1986, with the exception of 1991-92 when the Bracken

Basic Concept Scale was given. Achievement gains for the past three years (1993-94 through 1995-96) were examined for all students on the English PPVT, Spanish-speaking students on the English and Spanish tests, and English speakers only on the English PPVT. (See Appendices B and C for standard scores for the last three years.) Schools that showed consistent improvement and gains over the three years were investigated further.

- *Recommendations from program administrators* - A list of ten schools was reviewed by early childhood staff for further recommendation. Early childhood staff who have visited pre-K programs in AISD gave input. The final list of five schools emerged as our Best Practices Pre-K Schools.

The schools selected for further review were Andrews, Brooke, Galindo, Reilly, and Travis Heights. All of the schools, with the exception of Travis Heights Elementary, are Title I campuses and have full-day pre-K programs. The many innovative strategies utilized at Travis Heights make their half-day program of particular interest for this review.

Survey Methodology

To investigate factors that affect the improved achievement at the Pre-K Best Practices schools, the Title I evaluation staff designed and administered a series of interviews at the five campuses. Interview forms are included in Appendix A. The interview instruments included questions about the following areas:

- Special Programs and Curriculum
- Innovative Programs
- Principal Support
- School Organization and Team Planning
- Parental Involvement
- Student Achievement
- Learning Activities
- Special Strategies
- Professional Development

The pre-K teachers at each school were asked to complete an individual questionnaire, as well as a team questionnaire. A member of the Title I evaluation staff met with the teachers during a site visit, either on an individual basis or in a group, to discuss their program.

Principals (assistant principal in one case) were interviewed with more general questions about their schools and the pre-K program. Classrooms were visited briefly and a checklist was used to determine if the classroom was developmentally appropriate.

School Demographics

All of the students who attend pre-K are low-income and/or limited English proficient. Even though the students served by pre-K are similar, the schools that they attend are different in location and size. Two of the Pre-K Best Practices schools are in north Austin, two are in south Austin, and one is in east Austin. Reilly and Brooke are small campuses with less than 400 students each. Travis Heights, Galindo and Andrews are large campuses, with 770, 847, and 877 students, respectively.

All five of the Best Practices campuses serve students in pre-K through grade 5. All of the schools except Travis Heights receive Title I funds and provide a full-day pre-K program. The pre-K program at Travis Heights is half-day and is part of a multi-age structure (pre-K/kindergarten, or pre-K/kindergarten/grade 1).

The number of pre-K teachers at these campuses ranged from two teachers at Reilly to six teachers at Galindo. Eighteen of the twenty teachers have early childhood certification. The average number of years teaching experience is 12 (ranging from 0 to 20 years). Pre-K teaching experience averages six years, with the range being 0-10 years.

The ethnic makeup of these schools is quite diverse. Brooke has the highest percentage of Hispanic students (97%), Andrews has the highest percentage of African American students (41%), and Travis Heights has the highest percentage of Anglo/Other students (34%). Only one percent or fewer of the students at these schools are Asian or Native American. The percentage of low-income students ranges from 62% at Travis Heights (non-Title I school) to 92% at Brooke. The 1996-97 demographics for the Pre-K Best Practices Schools are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: 1996-97 Schoolwide Demographics for the Pre-K Best Practices Schools

Demographics	Andrews	Brooke	Galindo	Reilly	Travis Hts.
Ethnicity					
% Hispanic	51	97	70	59	57
% African Am.	41	1	10	15	8
% Asian	-	1	1	1	-
% Native Am.	-	-	-	1	1
% Anglo/Other	8	3	20	25	34
% Low Income	84	92	79	78	62
% LEP	33	30	15	21	17
% At Risk	40	43	25	30	28
% Special Ed.	15	9	12	13	7

A summary of information obtained from interviews with teachers and principals and from site visits to the campuses is presented by school. Achievement data from previous AISD prekindergarten studies will follow the school reports.

SCHOOL REPORTS

ANDREWS ELEMENTARY

Andrews Elementary School was built in 1962 in northeast Austin. As of February 1997, the pre-K through grade 5 student population was composed of 877 students. Because of the number of students enrolled at Andrews, many portable buildings line the campus grounds.

The student body consists of 51% Hispanic, 41% African American, and 8% Anglo/Others. Eighty-four percent of the students are from low-income families. Forty percent of the students are considered at risk.

The full-day pre-K program at Andrews consists of five classrooms - three for bilingual children and two for English-speaking children. Ninety-eight four-year-olds participate in the program. Ninety-eight percent of the pre-K students are from low-income families. Forty-five percent of the students are considered at risk. The gender mix is balanced with 51% female and 49% male. The ethnic breakdown of the pre-K students is 67% Hispanic, 28% African American, 4% Anglo/Other, and 1% Asian American. Table 2 shows demographic data for the Andrews pre-K students from 1994-95 through 1996-97. The percentage of Hispanic students has increased between 1994-95 and 1996-97 while the percentage of African American students has decreased.

Table 2: Demographics for Andrews Pre-K Students, 1994-95 through 1996-97

Demographics	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Ethnicity			
% Hispanic	57	58	67
% African Am.	39	35	28
% Asian	-	1	1
% Native American	-	3	-
% Anglo/Other	4	3	4
% Low Income	100	99	98
% LEP	40	46	46
% At Risk	100	44	45

Pre-K Teachers

The pre-K teachers at Andrews meet regularly to discuss and plan upcoming units. They share ideas that work in the classroom and support each other. All teachers have the same planning period. The pre-K classes use the DLM Early Childhood Education curriculum and AISD teaching units. Teacher-made materials and numerous personal and library books are also used in the classrooms.

Four of the five pre-K teachers have early childhood certification. One teacher is a long-term substitute who is working on her certification. The average number of years of teaching

experience (excluding the substitute) is seven years, with six years the average for teaching pre-K.

When asked if they believed the pre-K program at Andrews to be developmentally appropriate, the teachers responded, *"Yes."* One teacher responded, *"I feel our students enjoy learning in a safe, non-threatening, comfortable environment where they think it's "play" all day. They (students) can work at different levels, yet they are learning skills and concepts, and developing their language from the teachers and from each other."* One teacher felt that the room size (all pre-K classes are in portables) is not appropriate for centers.

Special Programs and Strategies

Andrews uses the Accelerated Schools model campuswide, which involves all teachers in decision-making. Special programs and strategies used at Andrews include special education inclusion, computer labs, and having older students work with and read to pre-K students (buddies).

Innovative programs are ongoing at Andrews. A pre-K through grade 5 curriculum alignment is in progress. The pre-K teachers are piloting a Summer Science Institute program called GEMS this year.

Language development is promoted through intensive use of books. Teachers read "good" books to students and integrate literature into lesson times as often as possible. Age-appropriate literature and manipulatives (real materials) are valuable aids in language development. Actual experiences and field trips serve as language builders. Charts, fingerplays, songs, and dictation are important to language development.

Successful learning activities include language experiences, reading "good" literature, journal writing, math journals, daily reading and writing activities in class, computers in the classroom, field trips, and extension activities for each unit during center times. Hands-on exploration and discovery activities get students interested in learning. The DLM picture cards and other high quality pictures and photographs promote, enhance, and build vocabulary in English and Spanish.

The bilingual pre-K program is strong at Andrews. The three bilingual teachers present information in the native language first, whenever possible. Instruction is delivered in both Spanish and English. The gains of the Andrews bilingual pre-K students on the *Test de Vocabulario en Imagines Peabody* (see Table 4) are evidence of the effectiveness of the bilingual program.

Awards are given to pre-K students in the classrooms. These awards include attendance, behavior, and individual classroom awards. The *Caught Being Good* program includes pre-K students.

Parent Participation

Andrews is an Austin Interfaith Alliance School, a partnership which encourages parents and community members to become actively involved in their communities and schools. One of the Austin Interfaith projects involved cleanup efforts in a neighborhood housing project. Family Math Nights are offered for all parents and students. Staff at Andrews also work with parents

through the adult ESL program. Training is offered on personal health issues and basic survival skills.

Pre-K teachers begin the school year with home visits. Teachers meet parents at the Back-to-School Night in the fall. Parents are encouraged to volunteer in classrooms and on field trips. Teachers communicate information about units being taught, either by weekly or monthly calendars. Conferences are held with parents in the fall and spring.

Assessment

Students in pre-K classes at Andrews are assessed at their own developmental level. Teachers at Andrews believe that each student comes with his/her own talents and levels. Anecdotal records are kept for each student, and portfolios are used to assess growth over time.

Teachers use informal assessment through observations in centers and listening to and talking with children. Social skills can be observed by daily interaction with other children. Verbal skills and writing skills improve with daily practice in class. Kindergarten teachers give valuable feedback to pre-K teachers about the preparation and progress of former pre-K students.

The Andrews pre-K students have made impressive gains on the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised* (PPVT-R) and the *Test de Vocabulario en Imagines Peabody* (TVIP) for the past two years (see Appendix B). Teachers reported using the results of testing for feedback on receptive vocabulary development.

Factors Affecting Success

Betty Jo Hudspeth, the principal of Andrews, believes that staff stability (same school, same level) has contributed to the success of the program. Teachers are knowledgeable about the curriculum and share ideas with each other. Teamwork is a major factor affecting the success of the pre-K program.

Teachers believe that a very supportive principal, assistant principals, and local administrative staff have been factors in the success of the pre-K program at Andrews. Having a common planning period makes it easier for teachers to give each other support and encouragement. Teachers say that the PTA support given to them is also important.

Ms. Hudspeth feels that early childhood education for low-income and limited English proficient students is definitely important for the development of social as well as academic skills. She says that "*these children are like sponges - eager to learn. This is where we can really make a difference. Early childhood education is the foundation for everything that comes later. Students need the enrichment that the program provides.*"

BROOKE ELEMENTARY

Brooke Elementary School was built in east Austin in 1954. As of February 1997, the pre-K through grade 5 campus had an enrollment of 398 students. The student body consists of 97% Hispanic, 1% African American, and 3% Anglo/Other. Ninety-two percent of the students are from low-income families. Forty-three percent of the students are considered at risk. The Brooke student population has been predominantly Hispanic for the years 1994-95 to 1996-97.

The full-day pre-K program at Brooke consists of three classrooms - two for bilingual children and one for English-speaking children. Forty-eight four-year-olds participate in the program. Ninety-eight percent of the pre-K students are from low-income families. Thirty-three percent of the students are considered at risk. The gender mix is 44% female and 56% male. The ethnic breakdown of the pre-K students is 98% Hispanic and 2% Anglo/Other. Table 3 shows demographic data for the Brooke pre-K students from 1994-95 through 1996-97. As with the overall demographics for Brooke, the Brooke pre-K student population has been predominantly Hispanic for the years 1994-95 to 1996-97.

Table 3: Demographics for Brooke Pre-K Students, 1994-95 through 1996-97

Demographics	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Ethnicity			
% Hispanic	94	98	98
% African Am.	-	-	-
% Asian	-	-	-
% Native American	-	-	-
% Anglo/Other	6	2	2
% Low Income	98	100	98
% LEP	35	34	33
% At Risk	-	20	33

PRE-K TEACHERS

The pre-K teachers at Brooke work together as a team. Teachers plan uniform yearly schedules that are followed closely by each teacher. Ideas, materials, and experiences are all shared on a daily basis.

All of the teachers use the AISD Early Childhood Curriculum Guide for instruction. It is supplemented with the DLM Early Childhood Education curriculum and individually produced units. The pre-K teachers say that they use "*teacher purchased manipulatives, teacher collected pictures, teacher recorded videos, teacher created games and manipulatives, collected posters, and books, books, books.*"

All three of the pre-K teachers have early childhood certification. The average number of years of teaching experience is eleven years, with five years the average for teaching pre-K.

When asked if they believed the pre-K program at Brooke to be developmentally appropriate, the teachers responded, "*Yes.*" One teacher said, "*We do activities that are age-appropriate. We are all early child teachers with the same philosophy.*" Another teacher said, "*My goal for the children is to strengthen all five areas of their development. I teach with thematic units and see myself as a facilitator to the children. I spend time preparing the classroom environment for hands-on learning. Materials for the children to use are varied in order to address the different levels of learning which is occurring in the room. All these things make the children interested in school and eager to learn.*"

Special Programs and Strategies

Teaching methods and activities learned in the ELIC (Early Literacy Inservice Course) taught by the Reading Recovery teacher at Brooke are used by all the pre-K teachers. The pre-literate skills course spans 12 weeks and focuses on the reading process for six weeks and on the writing process for six weeks. The morning message is a part of this system. In the morning message, one or two students provide a sentence in Spanish or English. Each child reads the sentence, identifying different parts of the sentence. Students locate specific letters within the sentence. The course is offered each semester at Brooke.

Special area instruction is offered to pre-K students during the teachers planning period. The pre-K teachers feel that participation in special areas has introduced children to a new vocabulary and encourages language development through music, art, and movement.

Two reading initiatives involve parents and community members. Read Along Pals is a program similar to HOSTS (Helping One Student to Succeed) that involves University of Texas students who read to students and listen to students read. The Reading Recovery teacher designed the program and the curriculum. A Parent Sharing Books program involves parents who come to the classroom and read to students.

Language development is promoted through a wealth of books to complement thematic units. Reading to the children and having a large selection of books available for the children to look at and use is important to language development. Thematic units engage the children's interest and provide them with information about the world around them. Learning centers encourage children to become involved in the various activities found in the room. Music, fingerplays, videos, and nursery rhymes enhance learning in these classrooms. Field trips accompany key units.

Pre-K students participate in Awards Assemblies at Brooke. Awards given to pre-K students include Lion's Pride, academic achievement, and other recognition awards determined by the teachers.

Parent Participation

Teachers encourage parents to participate in their children's education early in the school year by inviting them to attend a schoolwide Open House and by visiting the child and parent(s) in the home. Parents are encouraged to volunteer in the classroom, in the cafeteria during breakfast and lunch, and on field trips.

There is also a Parent's Room available to parents, called the Living Learning Room. Classes are available for parents as well as play sessions for infants and toddlers.

The pre-K parents participate in parent-teacher conferences in the fall and spring. Pre-K teachers send out newsletters to inform parents of units of instruction and upcoming activities. Newsletters provide parents with ideas that extend the concepts presented in the classroom.

Assessment

Pre-K teachers at Brooke are familiar with the pre-K report card, pre-K essential elements, and TAAS objectives, and try to incorporate these skills through lessons all year long in a developmentally appropriate way. Informal assessment includes observing children to see if they can do things that are required of them on the report card and listening to their language usage. Teachers consult with other teachers and ask for advice.

Feedback from parents of former pre-K students who say that their children are doing well in kindergarten is positive. Watching these students make the "A" or "B" honor roll when they get into the upper elementary grades is also positive reinforcement for the teachers.

English and Spanish-speaking students have made strong and consistent gains on the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised* (PPVT-R) and the *Test de Vocabulario en Imagines Peabody* (TVIP) during the three years of this study. Even though the 1995-96 PPVT pretest score for Spanish-speaking students was very low (29.2 standard score points), students showed considerable gains by the posttest (48.2 standard score points). See Appendix B for PPVT-R and TVIP scores for 1993-94 through 1995-96.

Factors Affecting Success

Graciela Morales, principal at Brooke, believes that the main factors contributing to Brooke's success with the pre-K program during the past three years are the ELIC training and Parent Sharing Books program. She says that pre-K teachers should have knowledge about reading and language, should be creative, and should have rapport with parents.

Teachers believe that the ability of the pre-K team to work together towards the common goal of providing the best education for the children has been important to the success of the pre-K program. Other factors that have contributed to the success of the program are ELIC activities; a print-rich environment; many stories, songs, fingerplays, and other hands-on learning activities; plus informative field trips and units.

Ms. Morales feels that early childhood education for low-income and limited English proficient students is *very* important. She says that pre-K *"exposes them to a world of books and experiences they would not have otherwise."*

GALINDO ELEMENTARY

Galindo Elementary School is the newest school facility visited during the Pre-K Best Practices Review. Galindo was built in 1988 in south Austin. As of February 1997, the pre-K through grade 5 campus had an enrollment of 847 students. The student body consists of 70% Hispanic, 10% African American, 20% Anglo/Other, and 1% Asian. Seventy-nine percent of the students are from low-income families. Twenty-five percent of the students are considered at risk.

The full-day pre-K program at Galindo consists of six classrooms - one for bilingual children, one for ESL children, and four for English-speaking children. Ninety-six four-year-olds participate in the program. Ninety-five percent of the pre-K students are from low-income families. Nineteen percent of the students are considered at risk. The gender mix is balanced with 48% female and 52% male. The ethnic breakdown of the pre-K students is 85% Hispanic, 7% African American, and 7% Anglo/Other. Table 4 shows demographic data for the Galindo pre-K students from 1994-95 through 1996-97. The percentage of Hispanic students has increased between 1994-95 and 1996-97 while the percentage of Anglo/Other students has decreased.

Table 4: Demographics for Galindo Pre-K Students, 1994-95 through 1996-97

Demographics	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Ethnicity			
% Hispanic	72	75	85
% African Am.	7	12	7
% Asian	4	-	-
% Native American	-	-	-
% Anglo/Other	17	13	7
% Low Income	95	100	95
% LEP	17	19	21
% At Risk	0	12	19

Pre-K Teachers

At Galindo, pre-K teachers are included with other grade level teachers in vertical teams. A pre-K teacher said that *"the pre-K program is not a unified pre-K team because our campus is organized in vertical teams."* One of the Galindo teams is composed solely of early childhood, pre-K, and kindergarten teachers, while the other vertical teams are composed of teachers from all grade levels.

All of the teachers use the DLM Early Childhood Education curriculum as part of instruction. Teachers supplement learning with *"every resource we can find, real materials, library books, and hands-on activities."*

Two of the teachers use the *High Scope* curriculum which focuses on adult-child interaction. The *High Scope* teachers were evaluated on the room environment, multi-cultural aspects, instruction, adult/child interaction, and assessment, and became certified this year. The *High Scope* curriculum follows a "plan, do, and review" structure.

All six of the pre-K teachers have early childhood certification. The average number of years of teaching experience is twelve years, with six years the average for teaching pre-K. When asked if they believed the pre-K program at Galindo to be developmentally appropriate, the teachers responded, *"Yes."* Since the alignment of vertical teams does not facilitate pre-K grade-level planning, teachers answered for themselves. One teacher said, *"My class is developmentally appropriate. We follow the NAEYC guidelines for a developmentally appropriate curriculum."*

Special Programs and Strategies

The special education inclusion program at Galindo is exemplary. Two large classrooms are set up for learning, with the pre-K teacher and two special education teachers facilitating learning. One room is used for active/loud learning, and the other room is used for activities involving live animals, music, and computers. There is an early childhood playground that is accessible from the classrooms. The special education teachers team with the pre-K teacher, who says of the special education teachers, *"They are great language teachers."* The pre-K teacher in this setting also uses the *High Scope* curriculum which promotes adult/child interaction strategies in small groups.

Many innovative practices are used in the special inclusion classroom. A recent visit by a group from the University of Texas began the *Engineering the Classroom* project which involved changing symbols and pictures in the classroom so that all students can participate in learning (one child in this classroom is autistic). The special inclusion pre-K classroom has also been included in TEA's *Promising Practices* report.

A pre-K teacher in another vertical team involved her pre-K children in multi-age activities with kindergarten children. Homework is sent home twice each week on the same days so that parents will expect it. Using real materials (e.g., phones, pots, and kitchen articles) instead of toys, and labeling materials (in English and Spanish in the bilingual classroom) are other strategies for learning. Adult/child interaction is very important to all of the pre-K teachers at Galindo.

Language development is promoted through a wealth of language experiences. Reading books to children, checking out library books, and giving children lots of experiences and language to go with these experiences are considered by the teachers to be important to language development. Music, fingerplays, puppets, and rhymes enhance learning in these classrooms. Students write in journals daily. The morning message, organized "talk and share," and extensive adult/child interaction make these interactive classrooms rich in language.

Field trips are experiences that have been successful learning activities for Galindo pre-K students. Because only one field trip is funded and teachers believe that these trips are very important, some of the teachers have fundraisers (e.g., selling candy) to earn additional money for field trips. One teacher even takes her class on the city bus to field trip sites.

Awards are given to pre-K students for attendance. Certificates are given for excellent (not perfect) attendance.

Parent Participation

Parents of Galindo students are encouraged to visit their children's classrooms. Workshops are provided for parents to encourage participation. Parents and teachers participate in conferences twice each year. Weekly newsletters keep parents informed of activities and topics of instruction.

Pre-K teachers begin the school year with home visits. Parents are invited to volunteer at school and on field trips as well as to help with homework.

Assessment

Teachers take daily observational notes and use these notes in planning for the next day. This daily note taking, teachers say, encourages constant assessment of the children's needs and interests. One teacher says, *"We keep track of each child's growth by our notes and portfolios and plan from these, not the curriculum guide."*

Language samples and teacher-made checklists are used by one teacher in addition to the other assessment tools. Formal assessment occurs every nine weeks.

English- and Spanish-speaking students made gains on the standardized assessment (PPVT-R/TVIP) for all three years of the study. The 1995-96 TVIP average posttest score was above the national average of 100 standard score points. See Appendices B and C for average scores for all students.

Factors Affecting Success

Nora Ojeda, the helping teacher at Galindo, believes that teachers are the main factor in increased achievement for pre-K students. She says that the teachers have dynamic personalities and are able to do the following:

- try new things;
- be flexible;
- work on a team;
- focus on students; and
- have high expectations for students.

Teachers believe that having a full-day pre-K program has contributed to Galindo's success. The principal is described as supportive, and open to innovative ideas and to teachers using individual teaching styles.

Ms. Ojeda feels that early childhood education for low-income and limited English proficient students is important *"because students are coming to school with increasingly limited language skills. Early childhood education gives children language and social skills and provides enriching experiences."*

REILLY ELEMENTARY

Reilly Elementary School was built in north Austin in 1954. The pre-K through grade 5 student population is small, with 332 students enrolled in February, 1997. A diverse student body consists of 59% Hispanic, 25% Anglo/Other, 15% African American, 1% Native American, and 1% Asian American. Seventy-eight percent of the student population are from low-income families. Thirty percent of the students are considered at risk.

The full-day prekindergarten program has two classrooms of four-year-olds -- one for English-speaking children and one for bilingual children. Thirty-five children are currently enrolled in the pre-K program. Ninety-seven percent of these children are from low-income families. The 1996-97 program has a predominately male student body with 71% male and 29% female students. The ethnic breakdown consists of 62% Hispanic, 27% Anglo/Other, 6% Native American, and 6% African American children. Table 5 shows that the ethnicity of pre-K students has varied from 1994-95 through 1996-97, while the low-income percentage has remained constant.

Table 5: Demographics for Reilly Pre-K Students, 1994-95 through 1996-97

Demographics	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Ethnicity			
% Hispanic	74	71	62
% African Am.	16	17	6
% Asian	3	-	-
% Native American	-	-	6
% Anglo/Other	8	11	27
% Low Income	97	97	97
% LEP	32	34	39
% At Risk	29	29	32

Pre-K Teachers

The two pre-K teachers work and plan together as a grade-level team. The pre-K instructional day consists of 15% small group activities, 25% large group activities, and 60% individual activities. The State-adopted DLM Early Childhood Education curriculum is supplemented with *Math Their Way* activities, lessons adapted from the AISD pre-K social studies handbook, and personal and school library books.

The pre-K teachers have early childhood certification and an average of 14 years experience teaching. They have an average of 7 years in pre-K education. The bilingual teacher has taught many bilingual workshops for fellow teachers.

When asked if they believed the pre-K program at Reilly to be developmentally appropriate, the teachers responded positively. *"Yes. The children are engaged in active learning experiences. They spend most of the time working individually or in small groups on activities that are largely child-initiated. We have a variety of materials that stimulate a wide range of interest and ability levels. Language development is a primary goal and activities and materials are used daily to foster that."*

Special Programs and Strategies

The Reilly campus utilizes Bill Glaser's Quality School Program. The control theory is used schoolwide and consists of teaching all children what behavior is expected from them and how any variations from that behavior will be handled.

Bilingual/ESL students are presented lessons in their native language first, whenever possible. The print-rich environment includes both English and Spanish labeling of materials and objects. The bilingual teacher speaks to students in both English and Spanish.

All children are afforded the opportunity to be active participants in these classrooms. Teachers work with students in centers where adult-child interaction occurs. Many literature-based activities and extensions (e.g., role-playing, acting out, journals, and writing centers) are provided.

Language development is promoted through reading of books, writing in journals, and viewing DLM picture cards. A library center is available with tapes and a recorder for students to use. The teacher engages the class in songs and fingerplays and points to the words on song charts as they sing. The entire campus participates in learning "words of the week." Props and materials in every center give the students a chance to use and to work with the vocabulary being developed.

Field trips are valuable experiences for the students. Student-made books and daily hands-on activities also provide successful learning activities.

Awards are given to pre-K students for attendance each six week period. Teachers have a formal awards program at the end of the year and invite the parents to attend. At this program, students are given an award for something outstanding about themselves. A trophy is given for attendance to students who missed no more than one day of school during the year.

Parent Participation

Pre-K teachers begin the school year with home visits. Parents are encouraged to be guest speakers and to go on field trips. Teachers and parents often have informal discussions before and after school. Weekly folders and newsletters go home with students. Last fall, the Reilly school community held a schoolwide Neighborhood Walk in which 20 teachers and staff visited the neighborhood surrounding Reilly. Parent-teacher conferences are held each fall and spring to discuss the students' progress.

Assessment

Daily monitoring during centers gives teachers much valuable information about the students' progress. Teachers also share information from the pre-K assessment checklist with parents. The pre-K teachers are attending training on the Primary Assessment of Language Arts and Mathematics (PALM), which will be used in 1997-98.

Portfolios are used to show growth throughout the year. At the end-of-the-year parent-teacher conference, each child will share his/her portfolio with the parent.

The Title I staff administers a pre- and posttest using the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised* (PPVT-R) and the *Test de Vocabulario en Imagines Peabody* (TVIP) each year as part of the Title I assessment. The gains made by both English- and Spanish-speaking students were high for all three years. Gains on the English PPVT are particularly high for Spanish-speaking students for the years 1993-94 through 1995-96 (15.8, 28.0, and 25.5, respectively). See Appendices B and C for pretest scores, posttest scores, and gains for these three years.

Factors Affecting Success

The pre-K teachers believe that a variety of teaching materials and manipulatives are important to the success of their program. The experience of the teachers as well as a strong bilingual/ESL program are of great benefit. The teachers emphasize language development, especially through the use of books. The fairly stable pre-K enrollment at Reilly allows teachers to know children well and make progress toward social and academic goals.

Reilly's principal, Mr. Encarnacion Garza, is new to Reilly this year, but he is very impressed with what he has observed in the pre-K program. He believes that the success of the pre-K program is the product of "*professional, dedicated teachers who allow children to communicate and feel happy and comfortable in their environment.*" Mr. Garza says that a pre-K teacher must have "*a love of children and the heart and passion for teaching.*" He believes that early childhood education is very important for low-income and limited English proficient children because "*We are compensating for the lack of resources that these children have. We are providing experiences for these children that they have not had.*"

TRAVIS HEIGHTS ELEMENTARY

Travis Heights Elementary School is the oldest school facility visited during the Pre-K Best Practices Review. Travis Heights was built in south Austin in 1939. Major renovations were completed in 1994. As of February 1997, the pre-K through grade 5 campus had an enrollment of 770 students. The student body consists of 57% Hispanic, 34% Anglo/Other, 8% African American, and 1% Native American. Sixty-two percent of the students are from low-income families. Twenty-eight percent of the students are considered at risk. Travis Heights is the only non-Title I school included in this study.

The half-day pre-K program at Travis Heights consists of four classrooms - three for bilingual children and one for English-speaking children. Fifty-seven four-year-olds participate in the program. Ninety-three percent of the pre-K students are from low-income families. Forty-six percent of the students are considered at risk. The gender mix is predominately female with 63% female and 37% male. The ethnic breakdown of the pre-K students is 81% Hispanic, 14% African American, and 5% Anglo/Other. Table 6 shows demographic data for the Travis Heights pre-K students from 1994-95 through 1996-97.

Table 6: Demographics for Travis Heights Pre-K Students, 1994-95 through 1996-97

Demographics	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Ethnicity			
% Hispanic	76	56	81
% African Am.	4	21	14
% Asian	1	2	-
% Native American	3	-	-
% Anglo/Other	16	21	5
% Low Income	94	94	93
% LEP	46	32	46
% At Risk	84	35	46

Pre-K Teachers

All classrooms at Travis Heights consist of students from two or three grade levels. Pre-K students are included in two variations of the multi-age classrooms. There are two pre-K/kindergarten classrooms and two pre-K/kindergarten/grade 1 classrooms. Pre-K teams of two teachers plan together. Teachers said, "*We do feel it is important to plan together because this allows for sharing of ideas, reconstructing of methods, and makes things more interesting and challenging for the kids.*"

Travis Heights pre-K teachers use a generative curriculum, which allows the children to choose topics of study that are of interest to them. They also use GEMS and FOSS units from the Summer Science Institute which they are piloting this year. DLM Early Childhood Education

curriculum, Scholastic, and AISD units are used as resources. *Mathland* is an open ended schoolwide math curriculum for multi-age classrooms.

Three of the four pre-K teachers have early childhood certification. The average number of years of teaching experience is 15, with five years the average for teaching pre-K.

When asked if they believed the pre-K program at Travis Heights to be developmentally appropriate the teachers responded, *"Yes."* One teacher said, *"All of the pre-K teachers use generative curriculum and elements of the project approach to provide lots of language, quality discussions, and exploration in the classroom. Seventy percent of the day is spent in child-initiated activities."* Another teacher said, *"We have been using developmentally appropriate practices for many years. Our participation in the TEA Longitudinal Pre-K Study increased our awareness of our practices."*

Special Programs and Strategies

Innovative programs and teaching strategies abound at Travis Heights. The pre-K teachers believe that the multi-age organization of the classrooms increases language development by varying the language levels of students. The classrooms that are pre-K/kindergarten/grade 1 are combined with two teachers and two student teachers from the University of Texas (UT). Travis Heights is a professional development center for UT.

The pre-K teachers believe that the Quality School model has helped the children make good choices. Teachers expect quality work from everyone and students know the consequences for improper behavior.

Student-generated projects are used to allow students opportunities to creatively show what they have learned. The projects combine reading, writing, science, social studies, and sometimes math.

Teachers say that language experience, meaningful conversations, and one-on-one reading times are used to promote language development in their program. Teachers say they provide *"lots and lots of language."* Some comments from teachers include the following:

- *"I empower children by giving them the opportunity to use language as often as they can. They use their language to solve problems, respond to others, share ideas, and express their needs and wants. I try to provide as much literature, songs, and rhymes where children can have meaningful experiences listening."*
- *"I read quality literature that is of interest to my students. I translate everything I read and have book discussions after each story. I ask genuine questions and have conversations with my students. After they write in their journals, they share (if they want to) what they wrote about with the class."*
- *"I believe that reading, to, with, and by children, increases language development. We read books throughout the day. Rhyme, repetition songs, fingerplays and chants are also used. I also believe we need to have genuine conversations often with children. Children need time and opportunities to use their language skills."*

Travis Heights does not give rewards or awards. The philosophy holds that students should be motivated intrinsically.

Parent Participation

Travis Heights pre-K teachers participate in Math Night and parent-teacher conferences. Student portfolios are presented at the spring parent-teacher conference. Parents volunteer in campus workdays and field trips. The whole pre-K team sends home weekly newsletters. Two of the teachers are doing Action Research on parent involvement. They presented workshops at St. Edward's University teaching parents about literacy and math concepts.

Several programs involve literacy. The Even Start program, which works with parents of young children to help with pre-literacy skills, is part of the Travis Heights program. A KLRU grant promotes family literacy. Reading is Fundamental is a way of getting parents involved with reading at home. Teachers check out books to students for parents to read to them.

Assessment

The student-generated curriculum used at Travis Heights is evaluated through the projects that students create. At the beginning of each year, teachers ask the students what they want to learn about. Teachers say that they always have *"burning questions."*

Teachers use the PALM assessment to address specific skills and have developed a campus set of benchmarks at the fourth grade level. Teachers work towards the benchmarks, beginning with pre-K.

Assessment occurs often and in the natural environment. Teachers say that they *"spend a good deal of time on kid-watching and taking anecdotal records. Each child has a portfolio that can be used for reflection also."* Other comments include the following.

- *"I want my students to love reading and learning so I try to incorporate all areas so that learning will be as natural as possible."*
- *"I do a lot of observing. I do assessments every few weeks, and I talk to them constantly."*

Gains were made by both English and Spanish speaking students on the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised* (PPVT-R) and the *Test de Vocabulario en Imagines Peabody* (TVIP) each year at Travis Heights for 1993-94 through 1995-96. Spanish-speaking students made strong gains on the English PPVT for all three years, (17.1, 10.2, and 18.9, respectively). See Appendix B for pretest scores, posttest scores, and gains for these three years.

Factors Affecting Success

Charlotte Taylor, interim principal at Travis Heights, believes that *"Everything the teachers do is special."* The pre-K teachers and the principal feel that multi-age grouping has had a great impact on the success of their students. They also believe that the Quality School model has helped the children.

Teachers feel that their involvement with the TEA Longitudinal Pre-K Study helped them to look at their program and to make improvements. Ms. Taylor feels that early childhood education is important for low-income and limited English proficient children because they need the variety of experiences provided by pre-K.

Travis Heights has received statewide acclaim for their innovative programs. Travis Heights is also a State Mentor School. Once a month visitors come to the campus to observe the use of non-graded portfolios and multi-age classrooms.

ACHIEVEMENT DATA

FOLLOW-UP ACHIEVEMENT DATA

Longitudinal data for students who attended pre-K and for similar students who did not attend pre-K were compared and analyzed by the Title I evaluation staff in 1995-96. The first analysis involved the testing of a sample of students at the end of kindergarten with the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-R* (PPVT-R) and the *Test de Vocabulario en Imagines Peabody* (TVIP). The other analysis involved examining the 1996 TAAS results for students who attended pre-K in 1988-89 through 1991-92 and for a similar group of students who did not attend pre-K. The findings from these 1995-96 comparisons are presented in the following pages.

KINDERGARTEN LONGITUDINAL STUDY

In 1995-96, as part of a longitudinal evaluation of the pre-K program, the AISD Title I evaluation staff tested a sample of kindergarten students with the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-R* (PPVT-R) and the *Test de Vocabulario en Imagines Peabody* (TVIP). In order to investigate effects over time of the prekindergarten program, a sample of kindergarten students who were served by the pre-K program in 1994-95 and a sample of Title I kindergarten students who were not served by pre-K were tested.

Two comparisons of scores were made. First, for students who attended pre-K, scores from the end of pre-K and scores at the end of kindergarten were compared. It was hypothesized that, if effects were sustained over time, students who attended pre-K would continue to make gains in kindergarten.

Then, the end of kindergarten scores for kindergarten students who attended pre-K were compared with test scores for kindergarten students who did not attend pre-K. It was hypothesized that, if the pre-K program was effective, students who were served by pre-K should have PPVT-R and TVIP scores that were at least equal to scores for similar students who were not served by pre-K.

Findings

The results of this study indicate that the pre-K program benefits language development, especially for the Spanish-speaking students. Spanish LEP students who attended pre-K outscored the Spanish LEP students who did not attend pre-K on the TVIP (93.6 and 87.9, respectively). The Spanish LEP students scored close to the national average of 100 on the TVIP.

While the kindergarten students who attended pre-K did not do as well on the English PPVT-R as the students who did not attend pre-K, the average scores were within 3.2 standard score points. Because of the entrance criteria for pre-K (students must be limited English proficient, low-income, or homeless), it was not possible to match the demographics of the two groups exactly. The larger number of Spanish LEP students in the group that attended pre-K may have lowered the PPVT average standard score as the Spanish speaking students typically score lower on the English language test.

The achievement results of this longitudinal pre-K study include the following :

- An average gain of 11.2 standard score points was made on the English language PPVT-R by Spanish LEP students who attended pre-K. Scores for Spanish LEP students increased from the end of pre-K (46.9) to the end of kindergarten (58.1).
- Overall, PPVT-R scores for all students who attended pre-K increased from 68.9 standard score points at the end of pre-K to 74.5 points at the end of kindergarten, for a gain of 5.6 standard score points.
- Scores for Spanish speaking LEP students who attended pre-K increased from the end of pre-K (89.5) to the end of kindergarten (93.6) on the TVIP.
- Scores for monolingual English kindergarten students who attended pre-K increased from the end of pre-K (84.9) to the end of kindergarten (86.5).
- Spanish LEP students who attended pre-K outscored Spanish LEP students who did not attend pre-K (93.6 and 87.9 standard score points, respectively) on the TVIP at the end of kindergarten.

When the scores of students who attended pre-K were analyzed, gains were evident in every comparison from pre-K to kindergarten. The prediction that students who attended pre-K would continue to make gains in kindergarten was true for English and Spanish-speaking students.

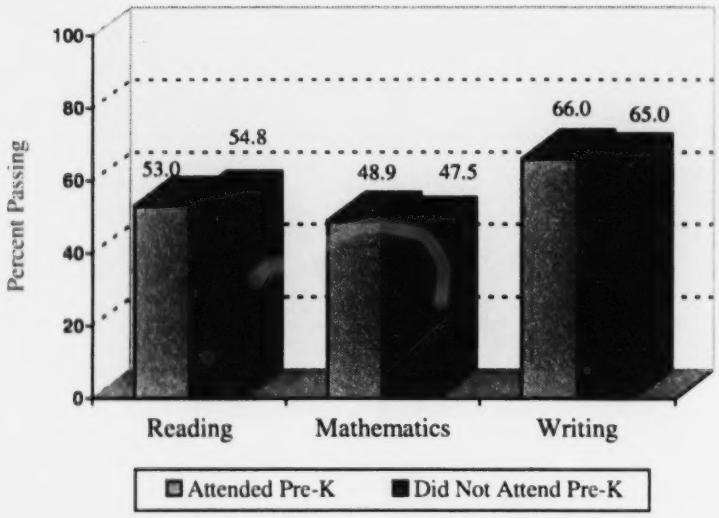
When compared to other kindergarten students at Title I schools, Spanish LEP students who attended pre-K outscored Spanish LEP students who did not attend pre-K by 5.7 average standard score points. Although students who attended pre-K scored an average of 3.2 standard score points below students who did not attend pre-K on the English PPVT-R, students who attended pre-K continued to make gains in kindergarten. The hypothesis that the kindergarten students who attended pre-K would have scores equal to or greater than students who did not attend pre-K was true for the Spanish LEP students. Thus, it appears that Spanish-speaking LEP kindergarten students build on the growth that is made in pre-K to surpass the achievement of low-income Spanish LEP students who did not attend prekindergarten.

1996 TAAS Achievement Data Review

In a longitudinal look at 1996 TAAS results for former AISD pre-K students, students in grades 3-6 who attended pre-K between 1988-89 and 1991-92 were compared with students in grades 3-6 at Title I schools who did not attend pre-K. Former pre-K students scored slightly higher on TAAS Mathematics and TAAS Writing, while low-income students who did not attend pre-K scored slightly higher on TAAS Reading. None of the differences are statistically significant.

It is a positive sign that the former pre-K students scored slightly higher on TAAS Mathematics and TAAS Writing than did the students who did not attend pre-K. The positive effects of pre-K seem to be long-term for low-income students who attended pre-K. Figure 1 shows the comparison of overall 1996 TAAS results of grades 3-6 former pre-K students and low-income students in Title I schools who did not attend pre-K.

Figure 1: 1996 TAAS Results for Former Pre-K Students and Low-Income Students at Title I Schools Who Did Not Attend Pre-K, Grades 3-6



The data presented here represent former pre-K students and non-pre-K students at all Title I schools in 1995-96. A look at the TAAS achievement of the five campuses in this best practices review for the three years, 1993-94 through 1995-96, can be found in Appendix D.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

VARIATIONS ON A COMMON THEME

The Pre-K Best Practices schools have given us insight into what makes pre-K programs successful. The most evident characteristic is that all of the schools and teachers have a sincere desire to help children learn and grow. These teachers, as well as those at other AISD schools, are deeply committed to the education of young children. The pre-K teachers that shared with us during this review indicated that they continue to learn and try new strategies to facilitate student learning.

All of the four-year-olds who attend pre-K must meet one of the eligibility requirements (low-income, limited English proficient, or homeless). Even though the students served by pre-K are similar, the schools that they attend are different in many other respects.

LOCATION AND SIZE

Location and size vary greatly with these AISD schools. Two of the Pre-K Best Practices schools are in north Austin, two are in south Austin, and one is in east Austin. Reilly and Brooke are small campuses with less than 400 students each. Travis Heights, Galindo and Andrews are large campuses, with 770, 847, and 877 students, respectively.

All five of the Best Practices campuses serve students in pre-K through grade 5. All of the schools, except Travis Heights, receive Title I funds and provide a full-day pre-K program. The pre-K program at Travis Heights is half-day and is part of the multi-age structure (pre-K/kindergarten, or pre-K/kindergarten/grade 1).

FACILITIES

All the schools in this review were built over thirty years ago, with the exception of Galindo which was built in 1988. All of the buildings are well maintained and appear neat and clean. Because of small classrooms and a wealth of materials used by pre-K teachers, some the classrooms have a crowded look. Only Galindo has a new building with large open areas for activities. Full-length built-in cabinets at Galindo keep classrooms from looking cluttered. Growth at one of the schools (Andrews) has forced the pre-K classrooms into portable buildings, which makes trips to the library, cafeteria, and assemblies more difficult and more time-consuming. All of the schools have a playground appropriate for pre-K children.

All of the pre-K classrooms have one or more computers, but most of them are older Apple IIe computers. Educational computer software in Spanish and English is in use in some of the bilingual classrooms that have later model computers.

SCHOOL ORGANIZATION

The type of organization of a campus is determined by each school. While all of the pre-K teachers believed that it is important to share ideas, the various campus organizations require different types of teaming. Galindo uses a vertical team approach with various grade level teachers working together. One of the Galindo groups is composed of early childhood, pre-K, and kindergarten, but other pre-K teachers work with vertical teams that are composed of teachers from all grade levels.

Andrews, Brooke, and Reilly have a more traditional grade-level team approach to organization. These teachers plan together and share ideas. Teachers feel that this teamwork is a strength of their pre-K program.

Travis Heights has two different teams. One team of two teachers works together with their pre-K and kindergarten multi-age classrooms, while another team of two teachers works with the pre-K/kindergarten/grade 1 multi-age group.

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

All five of the Pre-K Best Practices Schools use the NAEYC guidelines for developmentally appropriate practices. Elements of developmentally appropriate practices include: active learning activities; child-initiated learning; a variety of materials that stimulate a wide range of interest and ability levels; an environment that is stimulating and age-appropriate, safe and clean; toys and materials that are varied and in good condition; books that are of good quality and age-appropriate; and opportunities for music, movement, indoor and outdoor play. The observation of the classrooms by the Title I evaluation staff revealed that the pre-K classrooms at these schools meet all of these conditions. Some of the observations made by staff are listed below. (See Appendix A for the Prekindergarten Observation Checklist.)

- Classrooms are rich in print and pictures.
- Real materials are often used in place of toys that represent something real.
- All pre-K teachers use labeling of materials and furnishings in the room. Bilingual teachers label materials in English and Spanish.
- All classrooms are arranged differently and focus on different activities, but activities are developmentally appropriate.
- Some of the materials and furnishings look old, but are generally in good condition.
- All classrooms had tape players for music and for listening to stories. One classroom at Reilly had a reading loft for the library center.
- Books are attractively displayed in each classroom. In bilingual classrooms, there are books in both English and Spanish.
- There are not many opportunities to care for plants, animals, and other natural science objects in the classrooms that we visited.

CURRICULUM

All of the pre-K teachers use the DLM Early Childhood Education curriculum and the AISD Early Childhood Curriculum Guide to support learning. Learning is also supplemented with a multitude of additional resources - "*every resource we can find*," one teacher said. Pre-K teachers add a wealth of their own personal books and materials to those provided by the school and the district.

There are some variations in curriculum based on student needs. Because of the multi-age grouping at Travis Heights, teachers use an open-ended mathematics curriculum called *Mathland*. The Travis Heights teachers use a generative curriculum (based on what the students want to learn) and the project approach to provide additional language usage, quality discussions, and exploration in the classroom. Several of the programs pilot science curriculum from the Summer Science Institute.

SPECIAL PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIES

Many special programs and strategies are used by the teachers at the Best Practices schools. All schools have at least one bilingual classroom. Bilingual teachers instruct pre-K students in both English and Spanish, using the native language first whenever possible. Labeling of materials is also in both languages.

A model for structuring of a campus is used by three of the Best Practices schools. The Quality School model is used at two of the campuses (Reilly and Travis Heights) and the Accelerated Schools model is used at Andrews. Both of these models require a schoolwide approach to planning and discipline.

Galindo and Reilly incorporate special education inclusion into their pre-K programs. The inclusion at Reilly happens on an occasional basis, while Galindo has a special inclusion classroom for pre-K students which is widely acclaimed.

The *High Scope* program, which focuses on adult-child interaction, is used by two pre-K teachers at Galindo. The *High Scope* curriculum follows a "plan, do, and review" structure. The pre-K teachers were evaluated for *High Scope* certification on the room environment, multi-cultural aspects, instruction, adult/child interaction, and assessment.

The multi-age classroom is another way to implement developmentally appropriate classrooms. Travis Heights uses multi-age grouping schoolwide. The mixed-age instruction provides children with extended time to acquire in-depth understanding at particular levels. A pre-K teacher at Galindo says that her class interacts with the kindergarten class on her vertical team during planned activities. The pre-K teachers at all of the schools try to involve older students in reading to and talking with their students. This interaction expands opportunities for learning as younger children interact over long periods of time with older students.

PARENT PARTICIPATION

Pre-K teachers emphasize the importance of parental involvement to the education of the young children they teach. Teachers communicate with parents through newsletters about upcoming events and concepts that are being taught in class.

Parents are encouraged to volunteer in the classroom and on field trips. Parents are involved from the beginning through home visits by the teachers. Two conference days each year allow the parent and teacher to talk.

Homework folders are sent home twice each week at Galindo. Parents know to expect the homework on these days. English as a second language training and family literacy programs are offered at some campuses.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment is viewed by all of the pre-K teachers that we talked with to be essential to an effective pre-K program. Teachers perform both informal and formal assessment. Informal assessments include observing students at learning centers and at play with other students. Daily monitoring and anecdotal records are used by the teacher to plan strategies to use with students. Teachers review student journals for academic progress.

A student's pre-K assessment checklist, used by teachers to note progress over time, is shared with parents during conferences. Some teachers have students present their portfolios to

parents at the end-of-year parent-teacher conference. Feedback from parents and other teachers is a valuable asset to teachers.

Pre-K teachers are receiving training on the Primary Assessment of Mathematics and Language Arts (PALM) student performance assessment tool, which will be used districtwide in 1997-98 for grades pre-K through grade 2. Curriculum embedded assessment (adapting instruction in response to observation), portfolios, developmental profiles, and on-demand assessments (within particular time frame and under prescribed conditions) are the major components of the PALM.

Specific Strategies for Title I Students

Pre-K teachers were asked about specific strategies that they use with low-income and LEP-eligible students. Some of the strategies used include the following:

- Early Literacy Inservice Curriculum strategies are used for pre-literate (reading and writing) activities.
- For bilingual/ESL students, all lessons are presented in the child's native language first, whenever possible.
- Many literature-based activities and extensions (role-playing, acting out, journals, and writing centers) are provided.
- All children are afforded the opportunity to be active participants.
- The *High Scope* program used by two teachers at Galindo uses the "plan-do-review" approach to instruction.
- Language is developed through books, hands-on activities, "good" pictures and photographs.
- Adults have meaningful conversations with children to increase language development.
- Each library center has a tape recorder and tapes for students to use.

Tools for Increasing Language Development

The Texas essential elements for pre-K focus on the areas of communication, cognition, motor skills, fine arts, social/emotional, intellectual, aesthetic, and physical development. Language development is a major part of each of these areas. Tools for increasing language development were described by teachers to include the following.

- Reading to, with, and by children
- "Lots and lots" of reading throughout the day with age-appropriate literature
- Use of manipulatives and real materials
- Use of fingerplays, music, and nursery rhymes
- Actual experiences/field trips that serve as language builders
- Daily reading and writing activities
- Genuine questions and conversations with students
- Ample time to talk, think, and listen
- Multi-age grouping
- Discussions with students about their journal writing
- Multidisciplinary, thematic units

- Daily "hands-on" activities
- Student-made books and take-home book activities

PRINCIPALS' PHILOSOPHIES ABOUT EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR LOW-INCOME AND LEP STUDENTS

Principals participated in the Best Practices Review by responding to some questions during an interview. Two of the questions posed to principals were, *"Do you think that early childhood education is important for low-income and limited English children?"* and *"How do you think the early childhood program enhances education at your school?"* The responses to these questions follow.

- *Yes, it is important for social skills, as well as academics. The students are like sponges - eager to learn. This is where we can really make a difference. Early childhood is a foundation for everything that comes later. Students need the enrichment that the program provides.* (Andrews)
- *Early childhood education exposes them to the world of books and experiences they would not have otherwise.* (Brooke)
- *The early childhood program is especially important for the low-income and limited English proficient children because children are coming to school with increasingly limited language skills. The early childhood program gives children language and social skills and provides enriching experiences.* (Galindo)
- *Early childhood education is very important for the low-income and limited English children. We are compensating for the lack of resources that these children have. We are providing experiences for these children that they have not had. If we don't teach them early, we may have to remediate later.* (Reilly)
- *Early childhood education is absolutely important for low-income and LEP children. The children need experiences that are provided by pre-K and the language that they are immersed in.* (Travis Heights)

PRE-K TEACHER QUALITIES AND CHARACTERISTICS

It is apparent that pre-K teachers have challenges to face when teaching pre-K students at Title I schoolwide campuses. Principals at the Best Practices schools were asked, *"What professional and personal characteristics do you look for when hiring new pre-K teachers?"* The responses from principals are summarized below:

- A pre-K teacher needs to be a "people-person" who puts the child first. He/she should have complementary and compatible strengths with the other teachers. (Andrews)
- Pre-K teachers need knowledge about reading and language, be creative, and have good rapport with parents. (Brooke)
- Pre-K teachers need to be energetic, willing to try new things, flexible, able to work on a team, focused on students, and have high expectations for students. (Galindo)
- Pre-K teachers should be professional, dedicated teachers who allow children to communicate and feel happy and comfortable in their environment. They must have a love of children and the heart and passion for teaching. (Reilly)

- Professional and personal qualities that the principal at Travis Heights looks for are the ability to work with multi-age concept, good communication skills, child-oriented philosophy, flexibility, and a recognition of multiple intelligences in children.

Response from Teachers

Because of the abundant needs of pre-K students, teachers must have considerable support, both financially and physically, for the education of students. The Title I evaluation staff asked the teachers to respond to the question, *"How could AISD provide more support to the pre-K teachers at your school?"* The responses listed below indicate that teachers have many areas that they would like to have assistance with. Teachers said that they would like the following:

- More money for field trips (one trip per classroom is funded; some schools have fund-raisers to provide additional money for field trips)
- More money to buy additional materials for extension activities
- Replacement of old, out-dated, broken materials and manipulatives in older pre-K units
- Limiting class size to 16
- Appropriate activities for students during teachers' planning period (special areas)
- Money for cooking supplies
- More training on the DLM curriculum
- Full-day pre-K (Travis Heights)
- Reinstatement of the monthly pre-K staff development opportunities
- Paid days at the beginning of the year for student registration and homevisits
- Paid registration for teachers to attend the NAEYC Conference
- Opportunities to visit pre-K classrooms on other campuses
- *"No push-down!"* (TAAS)
- An advocate for pre-K classrooms to educate administrators on developmentally appropriate practices in teaching and in the classroom

Factors That Contributed to the Success of the Pre-K Program

The five Best Practices schools were selected based on their success on the PPVT and TVIP tests of receptive vocabulary over three years and the recommendation of administrative staff. There were many similarities found for the success of the pre-K programs at these campuses. These similarities include the following.

Strong teacher commitment to developing a curriculum that is age and developmentally appropriate

All of the pre-K classrooms follow developmentally appropriate practices, as outlined in the NAEYC guidelines. Anita Uphaus, AISD Early Childhood Education Coordinator, says that pre-K teachers are encouraged to use these practices in the classroom. Each teacher was given a copy of *First Impressions* (written by the Task Force on Early Childhood and Elementary Education), which discusses in detail the developmentally appropriate practices for early childhood, at a summer in-service training. Pre-K teachers use authentic materials in a print-rich environment. Teachers stress child-initiated learning with a variety of materials that stimulate the interest of prekindergarten children.

Supportive principals who encourage and respect teachers as professionals

The principals of the pre-K Best Practices schools were reported by teachers to be supportive and open to innovative ideas. Teachers feel that they are trusted as professionals. Many of the pre-K teachers are involved with planning at their campuses which makes them feel part of the schoolwide team.

Pre-K teachers at these schools are allowed to teach in ways that are developmentally appropriate. The teachers at Travis Heights said that their principal is *"interested in our own growth as professionals and asks us to take risks."*

Professional Development

Principals at the pre-K Best Practices schools encourage teachers to attend conferences and workshops to improve their skills. Principals allocate funds to pay for the training and for a substitute if one is required.

The Early Literacy Inservice Course (ELIC) was mentioned by many of the teachers as an important part of their training. This preliterate skills course spans 12 weeks and focuses on the reading process for six weeks and on the writing process for six weeks.

Teachers are also receiving training for the Primary Assessment of Language Arts and Mathematics (PALM). The PALM is a student performance assessment model designed to be an alternative to standardized testing.

Many of the teachers said that they are encouraged to attend professional development sessions of their own choosing. Some of the professional development activities that these pre-K teachers participated in included *Math Their Way*, William Glaser's Quality School/Control Theory training, Cooperative Learning, and Frameworks training.

Language Building

As stated in the AISD brochure about the prekindergarten program, the program focuses on language and concept development, problem solving, and thinking skills. All of the teachers emphasized the importance of language building. Teachers believe strongly that adult-child interaction improves language. Language development is promoted through a wealth of language experiences that includes reading books to children, checking out library books, and giving children a multitude of experiences along with language to go with these experiences.

Teachers use a variety of teaching materials and manipulatives (often teacher provided) to enrich language development. According to the teachers, learning centers provide an excellent means to engage children in learning. Teachers use center time to work with children one-on-one and in small groups. Informal assessment during center time provides valuable information to pre-K teachers. A print-rich environment and the use of real materials in centers add to a stimulating environment.

Each of these Best Practices schools has a strong bilingual program. Teachers believe in immersing the students in their native language while adding English gradually. Instruction in the bilingual classrooms is delivered in Spanish and English. The gains for the Spanish-speaking students on the PPVT and the TVIP are evidence that this method of instruction is beneficial to students.

Teamwork

All of the teachers stressed the importance of working with a team of teachers to strengthen teaching skills. Different levels of teaming were evident, but all of the teachers said that they valued the knowledge of fellow teachers. A unified schoolwide philosophy and goals help build strong communities of learners.

Parent Participation

Parents are an integral part of the education process. Teachers stressed the importance of home visits prior to the beginning of school to meet the students and their parents. Teachers communicate with parents through newsletters and assignments sent home with students.

Teachers involve parents in the parent-teacher conferences twice each year. Some of the schools have students present portfolios to the parents and teacher at the end of year conference. Parents are encouraged to come to the schools and participate in field trips and in the classrooms. Many of the schools offer parent education programs at their campus.

CONCLUSIONS

An informal theory exists that prekindergarten is a form of baby-sitting or simply a vehicle for social skills development. As we can see through the review of the NAEYC guidelines, investigation of prior research about early childhood education, and best practices findings from Title I schoolwide programs in the present report, this is not the case. Prekindergarten provides four-year-olds who have a limited educational background with an opportunity to be exposed to varied learning experiences and to be immersed in language.

According to the principals interviewed, it takes a "special person" to teach early childhood classes. A key to the success of a pre-K program is likely to be a combination of well-qualified teachers, a strong, supportive principal, and parents who are actively involved with their children's education. Findings from the Best Practices studies discussed in the introduction to this report are that these are also characteristics of a successful school.

Pre-K teachers at these Best Practices schools are very attuned to the developmentally appropriate practices for young children. A review of the NAEYC guidelines for developmentally appropriate practices shows that pre-K teachers who are having success with achievement are using the guidelines set forth to educate young children.

Many of the strategies for educating young children are in place at these five schools. Multi-age classrooms and activities, the use of both informal and formal assessment tools, and bilingual instruction are only a few of the strategies used to improve learning for four-year-olds in AISD. Teaching children in their native language first and incorporating English has increased achievement for Spanish-speaking students in both English and Spanish.

Teachers at all of these schools reported that they felt like they were treated as professionals and that they were allowed to teach in developmentally appropriate ways. Also, the teachers felt that they were part of a team, no matter what team structure existed at their campus.

In conclusion, there is no easy, single answer to the best way to teach four-year-olds. We have found many similarities in the pre-K programs offered at these schools. However, the pre-K programs are also unique, and are designed to best address the specific needs of the students served.

The teachers involved in this study are not only currently successful at teaching children, but they are flexible, open to learning new strategies, and open to change--whatever works for their students. These teachers have a passion for what they are doing and are succeeding in the process.

In popular literature and print media, much is often said about what is wrong with education. However, it is our belief that there are many things right with education as well. It is hoped that this review of prekindergarten best practices will have the positive impact of publicizing the work that has already begun in early childhood education in AISD, as well as serving to inform pre-K teachers and other program staff about effective practices for program improvement.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

TITLE I PRE-K BEST PRACTICES
TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

School_____**Teacher Name**_____

Please answer the questions on page 1 about yourself and your pre-K program. Pages 2 and 3 are designed to be answered about the overall program at your school. Your pre-K team is encouraged to get together to complete the Pre-K Team Questions. Please return the questionnaire to Janice Curry-CAC, Office of Program Evaluation by February 6 or have it available on the day of the visit. Thank you for your assistance.

1. Please answer the following general information about yourself.
   a) How many years have you taught? _____
   b) How many years have you taught pre-K? _____
   c) How many years have you taught at your current school? _____
   d) Do you have early childhood certification? _____

2. Do you feel that the program at your school is developmentally appropriate for pre-K students? Please explain.

3. On a typical day, what percentage of the instructional time is spent in the following structure?

   _____% Small groups
   _____% Large group
   _____% Individual activity

4. What tools do you find to be effective in increasing language development?

5. How do you know your students are learning what they need to learn?

School _____

PRE-K TEAM QUESTIONS

Please complete this form as a team. Only one copy per school is needed.

1. What is the standard curriculum used for the prekindergarten program at your school?

2. Do you supplement the standard curriculum? If so, what supplemental materials do you use?

3. What innovative programs does your pre-K program use (e.g., multi-age grouping, special education inclusion, computer labs)?

4. How does your principal support and encourage innovative ideas and professional development?

5. Do the teachers at your school plan and/or teach together? Is this important to a successful program?

6. How do you involve parents in your program?

7. What factors have contributed to your school's success with the pre-K program during the past three years?

8. Please describe some learning activities that have been successful with pre-K students in your classrooms.

9. What specific strategies does your pre-K program utilize to promote learning for pre-K students from economically disadvantaged and/or limited English backgrounds?

10. How could AISD provide more support to the pre-K teachers at your school?

PRE-K BEST PRACTICES QUESTIONNAIRE: PRINCIPAL

I. Special Programs

A. What special programs or curricula do the pre-K teachers at your school utilize?

B. What factors contributed to your school's success with the pre-K program during the past three years?

II. Teachers

A. What professional and personal characteristics do you look for when hiring new pre-K teachers? (Is early childhood certification important for a new pre-K teacher?)

B. How do you encourage and support your teachers (e.g., resources, incentives)?

C. What kinds of professional development does your school encourage and/or provide for pre-K teachers?

III. Students

A. Do pre-K students participate in awards assemblies?

B. What types of awards can pre-K students earn?

IV. Parents and Community

How do you encourage pre-K parent participation?

B. How does your school encourage family literacy?

V. Achievement

A. Do you think that early childhood education is important for low-income and limited English children?

B. How do you think the early childhood program enhances education at your school?

C. Have you seen an increase in achievement (percent passing TAAS) at the higher grades for students who have attended pre-K?

BEST PRACTICES QUESTIONNAIRE: EARLY CHILDHOOD COORDINATOR

1. Please explain the eligibility requirements for students to be enrolled in the AISD prekindergarten program?

2. What is your job description as the Early Childhood Instructional Coordinator?

3. Does AISD have a standardized curriculum for pre-K instruction? If so, what is the standard?

4. What other materials are good choices for use with prekindergarten students?

5. Does AISD emphasize the guidelines established by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) of developmentally appropriate practices for prekindergarten children? If so, how do you emphasize the guidelines?

6. Do all AISD pre-K programs meet the NAEYC guidelines for a developmentally appropriate program? Explain.

7. Are there essential elements for prekindergarten? If so, what are the essential elements?

8. What are the District expectations for pre-K students?

9. How do you know that children are learning what they need to know? How do you evaluate the pre-K program?

10. Is longitudinal data available from the Title I evaluation staff helpful in your evaluation?

11. What are the criteria (i.e., early childhood certification, State certification, experience, personal qualities) for a prekindergarten teacher? Do you screen pre-K teachers before principals interview them?

12. What do you think are the characteristics of an outstanding pre-K program?

13. Do upper-level elementary teachers transition well to pre-K classrooms? Is additional professional development necessary?

14. What do you think are the strengths of the pre-K program at the five schools, Andrews, Brooke, Galindo, Reilly, and Travis Heights, that we will visit as part of our Pre-K Best Practices Review?

15. What impact do you believe early childhood education has on economically disadvantaged and the limited English proficient children?

PREKINDERGARTEN OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

School _____ Date _____

1. The environment is stimulating and age-appropriate.
   ☐ *Yes* ☐ *No* ☐ *Unsure*

2. The environment is safe and clean.
   ☐ *Yes* ☐ *No* ☐ *Unsure*

3. The toys and materials are in good condition.
   ☐ *Yes* ☐ *No* ☐ *Unsure*

4. There are enough blocks of all sizes, balls, and dramatic play objects to encourage physical development as well as imaginative play.
   ☐ *Yes* ☐ *No* ☐ *Unsure*

5. There are plenty of tools and hands-on materials, such as sand, clay, water, wood, and paint to stimulate creativity.
   ☐ *Yes* ☐ *No* ☐ *Unsure*

6. The classrooms include sturdy puzzles, construction sets, and other small manipulative items for the children.
   ☐ *Yes* ☐ *No* ☐ *Unsure*

7. The books are attractively displayed , of good quality, and age-appropriate.
   ☐ *Yes* ☐ *No* ☐ *Unsure*

8. There are plants, animals, and other natural science objects for children to care for or observe.
   ☐ *Yes* ☐ *No* ☐ *Unsure*

9. There are opportunities for music and movement experiences.
   ☐ *Yes* ☐ *No* ☐ *Unsure*

10. Activities are balanced between physically active outdoor play and quiet indoor play.
    ☐ *Yes* ☐ *No* ☐ *Unsure*

Comments:

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX B

AVERAGE PRETEST, POSTTEST, AND GAINS ON THE PPVT-R FOR ALL STUDENTS AND ENGLISH-ONLY STUDENTS, 1993-94 THROUGH 1995-96*

	PPVT All Students			PPVT English-Speaking Students		
	Pretest	Posttest	Gain	Pretest	Posttest	Gain
Andrews						
1993-94	51.9	57.0	5.2	70.7	79.9	9.2
1994-95	57.5	65.8	8.3	69.6	80.8	11.3
1995-96	53.7	66.1	12.4	79.6	85.3	5.7
Brooke						
1993-94	65.3	76.1	10.8	77.1	86.1	9.0
1994-95	61.9	71.4	9.40	68.3	81.1	12.8
1995-96	55.0	70.1	15.1	69.8	82.6	12.8
Galindo						
1993-94	70.6	82.1	11.5	83.3	89.5	6.2
1994-95	73.4	87.3	13.9	83.2	97.7	14.5
1995-96	77.8	88.0	10.2	84.0	94.3	10.3
Reilly						
1993-94	65.6	80.1	14.4	79.4	93.3	13.9
1994-95	60.2	79.9	19.7	74.9	88.4	13.5
1995-96	65.0	81.5	16.5	80.3	91.6	11.3
Travis Hts.						
1993-94	65.3	78.7	13.4	78.5	89.5	11.0
1994-95	62.8	69.9	7.2	77.9	82.8	4.9
1995-96	62.7	77.8	15.1	84.6	96.1	11.5

* Scores presented are standard scores with a mean of 100.

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APPENDIX C

AVERAGE PRETEST, POSTTEST, AND GAINS ON THE PPVT-R AND TVIP FOR SPANISH-SPEAKING STUDENTS, 1993-94 THROUGH 1995-96*

	TVIP Spanish-Speaking Students			PPVT Spanish-Speaking Students		
	Pretest	Posttest	Gain	Pretest	Posttest	Gain
Andrews						
1993-94	83.3	88.8	5.5	27.3	27.2	-0.1
1994-95	75.5	84.4	8.9	41.0	45.5	4.5
1995-96	78.8	90.0	11.2	30.3	48.8	18.5
Brooks						
1993-94	82.5	100.5	18.1	32.1	48.0	15.9
1994-95	80.1	93.1	13.0	52.4	58.1	5.6
1995-96	79.1	87.4	8.40	29.2	48.2	19.0
Galindo						
1993-94	81.0	88.0	7.0	39.7	64.0	24.3
1994-95	84.9	92.0	7.1	39.5	51.5	11.9
1995-96	93.6	100.7	7.1	39.9	49.6	9.7
Reilly						
1993-94	74.8	87.8	13.0	31.3	47.0	15.8
1994-95	86.9	102.6	15.7	39.8	67.8	28.0
1995-96	83.2	88.5	5.3	38.5	64.0	25.5
Travis Hts.						
1993-94	89.8	87.2	-2.6	44.7	61.8	17.1
1994-95	88.3	97.0	8.7	38.5	48.8	10.2
1995-96	90.7	99.1	8.4	38.5	57.5	18.9

* Scores presented are standard scores with a mean of 100.

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APPENDIX D

TAAS ACHIEVEMENT DATA BY SCHOOL AND SUBJECT, 1993-94 THROUGH 1995-96

Subject by School	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96
Reading			
Andrews	64	62	62
Brooke	71	52	60
Galindo	63	63	70
Reilly	59	69	72
Travis Heights	72	78	70
Mathematics			
Andrews	48	44	53
Brooke	54	41	54
Galindo	50	54	64
Reilly	41	54	69
Travis Heights	52	57	60
Writing			
Andrews	76	72	84
Brooke	69	63	84
Galindo	68	85	67
Reilly	82	78	88
Travis Heights	81	68	78

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